

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY) made the following remarks today at a press conference with Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and other House Democrats announcing the PROGRESS Act:

I spent four years on the House Armed Services Committee; I now serve on the Energy and Water Subcommittee of Appropriations. I'm a pro-defense Democrat who believes in a strong and robust military. And the PROGRESS ACT is an important national security measure.

Almost every military challenge we face is derived from our dependence on foreign oil. I visited China last month on an energy security congressional delegation. While we were there, the Chinese government announced that it was expanding its navy to protect its energy supplies. Iran is on the road to developing nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, it sits on the second largest recoverable of oil in the Persian Gulf and controls 25% of world crude oil that travels through the Straits of Hormuz.

How do we protect against emerging threats? With a strong military. Last year the Department of Defense spent \$10.6 billion dollars on basic energy costs. Of that the Air Force spent \$4.7 billion dollars on one thing: buying fuel for its planes. The Stryker Combat Vehicles that transport our troops in Iraq get about seven miles to the gallon. The C-17s that transport mission critical equipment burn 3,000 gallons of fuel an hour.

So we are borrowing money from China to fund our defense budgets to buy oil from the Persian Gulf to fuel our weapons to protect us from China and the Persian Gulf. It's not an absurdity. It's a fundamental vulnerability.

Our dependence on foreign oil is as glaring a threat to our national security as Sputnik, the Cold War and the Space Race were. We confronted and beat these threats through research and development and a national commitment. And we'll do the same by passing the PROGRESS Act. It uses the same techniques that we used to land man on the moon by fostering collaboration between government, the private sector and academia by creating the National Energy Security Commission. It harnesses the DOD's potential to be a leader in advanced energy by authorizing the DOD to enter into long term contracts to purchase biofuels and other unconventional fuel sources. It also requires that the Secretary of Defense report to Congress on the Department's use of flex fuel vehicles and alternative fuels.

Yesterday, the Energy and Water Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, on which I sit, had a hearing on the outlook for advanced energy technologies. If we continue on the present path, the outlook is bleak. In the past thirty years, federal investments in renewable energies plummeted 85% (in real terms) -- from \$5.5 billion in 1978 to \$793 million in 2005. The result? In 1973, renewable energy was 6% of the US energy portfolio. In 2004 it was still 6%. Meanwhile, total US energy consumption will grow by 30% by 2030.

It's time to end the missteps, back-steps and half-steps that have characterized U.S. energy policy. As a matter of our own national security, it's time for a giant leap forward. That is exactly what the PROGRESS ACT achieves.

The PROGRESS Act would:

- Establish a National Energy Security Commission that would bring together government, industry and academic leaders to develop consensus national goals that respect regional energy solutions
- Establish a New Manhattan Center for High Efficiency Vehicles
- Establish a National Biofuels Infrastructure Development Program
- Promote Transit Use & Develop a Rail Infrastructure Program
- Ensure Federal Government Leadership in the Use of Alternatives to Oil.

In July 2006, Israel, along with his colleague Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD), formed the Defense Energy Working Group. The working group, founded on the premise that the military's dependence on energy is a national security vulnerability, is a bipartisan study group of House members that identifies challenges associated with this dependence and recommends logistical and policy solutions. Israel is also founder and co-chair of the Democratic Study Group on National Security, and chairs the Democratic Caucus Task Force on Defense and the Military.